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Disarmament Commission

285th meeting

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New York

Chairman: Mr. de Klerk ..... (Netherlands)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

General exchange of views (*continued*)

Mr. Davide (Philippines): Mr. Chairman, the Philippines would like at the outset to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your well-deserved election at this important session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. We are confident that under your able guidance and leadership the 2008 session will yield substantive progress and results. The Philippines also congratulates the Chairs of Working Groups I and II and wishes them every success in their challenging work.

The Philippines, as one of the Vice-Chairs, likewise takes this opportunity to extend its profound gratitude to delegations for the trust and confidence they have placed in the Philippines and would like to assure all of them that it will do its utmost in performing its tasks and fulfilling its duties as Vice-Chair for the 2008 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

The Philippines associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement by our colleague from Indonesia.

The issue of disarmament has become ever more relevant to our world today. We must achieve progress on this issue. We cannot afford to fail or delay action on it; hence the urgent need for delegations to be flexible and to have the willingness to compromise so that we, as nations united, with peoples hoping and clamouring for peace, can achieve our common goal of peace, established in particular through disarmament. Without disarmament, it is difficult to imagine how we can accomplish the goal of the United Nations, as solemnly enshrined in the Charter, namely, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

The Philippines views the Commission as a vital mechanism in the area of disarmament. It firmly believes in its principles and objectives and assures other delegations that the Philippines will be as cooperative and as supportive as possible.

The Philippines respectfully submits that at the convening of this session there is a recognition that much has yet to be done by the Disarmament Commission and that the session must produce positive and tangible results. Let us now, with greater resolve, exert every effort to achieve such positive and tangible results, as the Commission's contribution to the continued enhancement of the architecture for a durable peace the world over.

The Philippines believes that in order to install a reign of lasting and durable universal peace and security, there must be progress in Commission's stalled work on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The elimination of nuclear weapons would stop or prevent the devastating and catastrophic terror that such weapons could unleash upon mankind. The Philippines is very concerned about the long-standing lack of progress — or, in some cases, the reversal of progress or outright retrogression in this area — in the light of the fact that nuclear-weapon States continue to engage in the qualitative

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development of nuclear stockpiles. Accordingly, continued multilateral discussions and dialogue on this issue should be patiently and persistently pursued.

The Philippines, in support of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, calls on all States to ban all forms of nuclear testing, given their harmful effects on our environment and their provocative nature and effects, which could lead to even more tests and improvements of weapons that should, in the first place, be phased out and eliminated from the arsenals of all States.

The Philippines devoutly wishes all States to fulfil their obligations and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and therefore calls on them to do so. Like other States, the Philippines fears the possibility that these types of weapons may fall into the hands of terrorists. We must prevent non-State actors from acquiring any of the various types of weapons of mass destruction.

The Philippines supports calls for the issuance of a universal legally binding instrument on security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States. It reaffirms its belief in the undeniable usefulness of nuclear-weapon-free zones and would like to see more of them established. We urge the nuclear-weapon States to honour and respect these zones.

With regard to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Philippines believes that it is the ultimate cornerstone of all efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. States must therefore fulfil their obligations under that vital international instrument.

With regard to confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms, the Philippines submits that such measures are vital to achieving international peace and security. Although conventional weapons do not have the same devastating effect as nuclear weapons, they are just as potent and have killed or maimed countless hapless people. The rampant production, continued upgrading and indiscriminate use of these weapons must be stopped. The Philippines believes that confidence-building measures help establish a climate of trust, which leads to a reduction in tensions and, eventually, to disarmament.

Finally, the Philippines strongly supports all unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral activities undertaken by Governments to reduce military expenditures and calls on other States to do the same.

In conclusion, the Philippines reiterates its readiness to participate fully, actively, conscientiously and constructively in this year's substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. It hopes that, together in prayer for a world with durable and lasting peace and security, we will achieve significant progress and tangible results in the field of disarmament during this session.

Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2008 session. I would also like to congratulate the members of the Bureau. I wish you every success in discharging your mission, while assuring you of our full support in this regard.

I would like to seize this opportunity to commend the efforts in the field of disarmament by the Secretary-General and by Mr. Sergio Duarte, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, since assuming his post last year.

Each part of the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery plays an important role in mitigating the threats to peace and security all over the world, be it the First Committee of the General Assembly, the Conference on Disarmament or the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. There is no doubt that the Disarmament Commission plays an indispensable role as the competent, deliberative body within this machinery that holds in-depth deliberations on specific disarmament issues, resulting in the submission of concrete recommendations on them. Therefore, earnest efforts must be made to ensure that the meetings of the Commission's two Working Groups provide an opportunity to arrive at concrete positive results, each on its respective item.

Nuclear disarmament is the most important item in the universal disarmament agenda, but the five nuclear States designated by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) refuse to commit themselves to implementing the most important article in the Treaty, which is stopping the development of their nuclear arsenals and reducing them.

The work of the second Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will be launched in Geneva this month. We would like

to underscore the need to undertake the review process in light of the resolutions and decisions of the two previous conferences. In order for the second Preparatory Committee to succeed, all States parties must take sincere, practical positions and refrain from politicizing the decisions of the Committee, so that the 2010 conference will not meet the same fate as its predecessor.

In its international relations, the State of Qatar is committed to strengthening the NPT and consolidating its foundations, namely, the prevention of proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We emphasize the inadmissibility of compromising the inalienable right of the States parties to acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and the need not to impede the efforts of non-nuclear-weapon States parties to develop their nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes. The selective approach to the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty serves only to increase proliferation and intensify the race to develop the power of deterrence, instead of controlling them.

It is imperative to activate Security Council resolution 984 (1995), which is relevant to the Middle East, and establish a practical mechanism for its implementation, one conducive to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

The States parties to the NPT, especially the three nuclear States that sponsored the Middle East resolution, need to break the silence over the Israeli nuclear policy, which contravenes the NPT and which will drag the entire area into an arms race and jeopardize Arab national security and that of the entire world.

Among the other challenges in the area of disarmament that pose a threat to international peace and security and that must not be overlooked, we would like to single out the following.

First, there is the problem of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The results of the relevant Review Conference of 2006 were disappointing indeed.

Second, a source of profound concern is the proliferation of land mines such as those planted by Israel in South Lebanon during its invasion of the area. We condemn the failure of Israel to hand over the maps of the mine fields, in spite of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Those mines continue to claim the lives of civilians and to injure and maim them.

Third, we share the concern of the international community over the danger posed by conventional weapons and their continued development. Practical confidence-building measures must be taken in this domain, provided such measures are consistent with the United Nations Charter and that they are implemented on a voluntary, mutual basis.

Fourth, we note with concern the trend towards increasing world military expenditure, which has exceeded one trillion dollars annually. We all know the amount of international resources that this consumes, resources that could otherwise be used in the service of development.

The State of Qatar is party to many international conventions in the field of disarmament. It is party to the NPT, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the International Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. Furthermore, the State of Qatar is currently studying other conventions and treaties with a view to signing or acceding to them.

The State of Qatar has taken part in all disarmament conferences and has supported all resolutions designed to promote peace and security in the world through disarmament. It also strives to enhance international efforts to create an appropriate climate to facilitate the entry into force of the CTBT.

On the national level, the task of arms control and the prohibition of weapons have been assigned to a commission established for that purpose in 2004, which includes representatives of relevant ministries and State authorities. That Commission actively discharges its duties. It has recently concluded, for instance, the drafting of enforcement regulations for Law no. 17 of 2007, which was enacted last year with the aim of prohibiting the use, production, acquisition or stockpiling of chemical weapons by any person or party. Moreover, the Commission recently organized a national workshop to promote the Chemical Weapons Convention in the State of Qatar, to publicize the Convention and to exchange experiences in that regard.

with the participation of 120 experts from State entities and the industrial sector.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo): On behalf of the Group of African States, I would like to join all the previous speakers on congratulating you, Sir, upon your assumption of the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission at its 2008 session. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau and the Chairs of the Working Groups on their elections. We are confident that under your capable guidance and leadership, this session of the Commission will achieve fruitful results. We hereby assure you of our full support and collaboration.

The African Group would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to the Office for Disarmament Affairs for its continued service to Member States in promoting the cause of global disarmament and universal peace.

While agreeing with the position of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the African Group emphasizes the importance of the Disarmament Commission as a deliberative body that examines and discusses specific issues in the field of disarmament and makes recommendations to the General Assembly. On that basis, the African Group considers that the Commission's current session is very relevant in terms of the overall objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. We therefore expect useful recommendations to emerge from this session.

The African Group reaffirms its absolute commitment to multilateral diplomacy. It believes strongly in the promotion of multilateralism in the field of disarmament as an essential way to strengthen universal peace and security, as well as in the pursuit of our common interests in this area. The African Group joins other Member States in the NAM in expressing deep concern at the growing resort to unilateralism in addressing issues of multilateral interest.

We in the African Group share the view that nuclear weapons pose a great threat to international peace and security and that the most effective means of achieving nuclear disarmament should be the commencement of multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a convention prohibiting the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer and the threat or use of nuclear weapons and on their total elimination. We reiterate that the principal of that objective should be a commitment by nuclear-weapon States to immediately stop the qualitative improvement, development, production and stocking of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems.

Pending the total elimination of those nuclear weapons, a legally binding international instrument should be established under which the nuclear-weapon States would undertake not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and also not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

The African Group stresses the importance of ensuring that the meaningful nuclear disarmament process should be irreversible, transparent and verifiable.

The African Group notes the cardinal role played by the Conference on Disarmament as the only multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament.

We reaffirm that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a vital instrument in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The African Group emphasizes the importance of consolidating the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and establishing new such zones on the basis of arrangements freely reached by the States of the concerned regions. Nuclear-weapon-free zones indeed play an important role in the maintenance of regional peace and security.

The African Group welcomes all efforts at establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zones in the Middle East. The Group calls upon countries in the region to take practical and urgent steps for the full operationalization of such a zone.

Concerning the agenda item on confidence-building measures, the African Group remains convinced that the ultimate goal of such measures in the field of conventional arms is to strengthen international peace and security and to contribute to the prevention of war. Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms should fully respect the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The African Group notes with concern the recent trend of rising global military expenditures. The Group

believes that the reduction of military budgets is an important confidence-building measure that can contribute to global peace and security.

We are further deeply concerned about the illicit transfer, manufacture and circulation of small arms and light weapons and about their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world, especially in Africa. We wish to welcome the ongoing Group of Experts on small arms and light weapons. We hereby call upon all Member States to give the group their utmost support in order to enable it to fashion a reliable universal instrument on small arms and light weapons.

Finally, the African Group calls for frank and genuine efforts by all groups aimed at reaching consensus with a view to making our world a better and safer place for us and for our posterity to live.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to preside over this important session. You may rest assured of my delegation's support for your efforts to ensure that the Commission will have a successful session.

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The agenda item dealing with the issue of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is of great relevance to international security. The greatest threat to international and regional security and stability arises from the continued existence of nuclear weapons. At the time of the conclusion of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it was promised that the nuclear threat, particularly against non-nuclear-weapon States, would be removed in all its aspects, including through the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Not only has the threat persisted until now, but also we see that the commitment of some nuclear-weapon States to move in the direction of nuclear disarmament has languished. Some 27,000 nuclear weapons continue to exist.

The NPT is an agreement based on a basic bargain. According to the two components of that bargain, non-nuclear-weapon States pledged not to acquire nuclear weapons in exchange for the commitment from nuclear-weapon States to pursue nuclear disarmament negotiations aimed at the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

The 2008 session of the Disarmament Commission begins at a time when, on the one hand, it has been widely recognized that non-proliferation obligations are being successfully implemented except in cases of transfer of nuclear-weapon technology by certain nuclear-weapon States to non-parties to the NPT, and, on the other hand, today's situation of nuclear disarmament process seems frustrating and threatening to non-nuclear-weapon States, due to the unfulfilled disarmament undertakings and a growing threat by certain nuclear-weapon States against non-nuclear-weapon States.

Against that backdrop, the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, along with the overwhelming majority of Member States, maintains its position that nuclear disarmament remains the most important priority in the field of disarmament.

In recent years, a series of developments has given rise to the pervasive concern that some nuclear-weapon States have no genuine will or intention to accomplish the disarmament part of the NPT bargain. To depict the scale of this crisis, I draw the Commission's attention to some worrying trends and related developments taking place in the context of article VI of the NPT.

A dangerous trend has been initiated by certain nuclear-weapon States by which they reinterpret their unequivocal undertakings to nuclear disarmament. They cunningly assert that the fulfilment of their disarmament obligations is subject to the emergence of an international security environment, the definition of which is known only to them. In fact, they are establishing a precondition for compliance with their obligations, and it is they who will decide how, when and under what circumstances that precondition will be met. The speeches by the representative of the United States and the Secretary of Defence of the United Kingdom, made at the 2007 session of the First Committee and at the 5 February 2008 meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, respectively, are the most recent examples in that regard. By so saying, they not only flout that to which they have solemnly agreed, but also establish a counterproductive model for others — a model that is not in the interest of the integrity of the NPT.

I do not intend to recite the provisions of the NPT and of the agreements reached at the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences, but I wish to stress a few points in that regard. First, article VI is clear about the nuclear disarmament obligation: no conditionalities. Furthermore, in 1995, all nuclear-weapon States acknowledged the fact that

> "Nuclear disarmament is substantially facilitated by the easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between States which have prevailed following the end of the cold war".

It was in line with that recognized fact that, in 2000, they agreed to a blueprint, known as the 13 practical steps, for the implementation of article VI of the NPT without conditionalities. That is why the case against a reinterpretation of article IV is overwhelming. We must ensure that there is no place in this Commission or in the NPT family for such an arbitrary and irresponsible interpretation.

It is unfortunate to see that the same States are engaged in destabilizing the international security environment by either building or advocating a missile shield in Eastern Europe on the basis of declaratory assessments of hypothetical and non-existent threats. Furthermore, some nuclear-weapon States, instead of fulfilling their obligations as required under article VI of the NPT and the agreements reached at the 2000 Review Conference, have chosen to build new nuclear weapons and to modernize their nuclear-weapon systems. That is a very dangerous trend. For instance, the United States Administration, in an extensive and multi-billion-dollar programme, is seeking to build a new generation of nuclear warheads and new nuclear-weapon facilities.

This, together with the other anti-nuclear-disarmament policies and actions, constitutes intentional non-compliance in the context of article VI of the NPT and the agreements reached at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. The instances of United States non-compliance with the Treaty's disarmament obligations vividly illustrate the challenges facing the NPT. We should discuss and address those cases in the upcoming Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference.

At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, nuclear-weapon States undertook to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies as a step towards nuclear disarmament. It is truly regrettable that some nuclear-weapon States are acting in contravention of that obligation. They have adopted policies that have led to an increase, rather than a reduction, in their reliance on nuclear weapons. In recent years, this trend has been accelerated and has led to the prevalence of the role of nuclear weapons in international security. Clearly, the international community must oppose this tempting but dangerous trend.

After 2000, the United States included in its military doctrine the notion of using nuclear weapons in combat against specific targets. In 2006, the United Kingdom decided to procure a new generation of nuclear-armed Trident submarines and to extend the life of the related nuclear missiles well into the next century. And recently, France announced the addition of a new submarine carrying nuclear-armed ballistic missiles to its nuclear arsenal. The French President is quoted as saying, "French nuclear forces are a key element in Europe's security".

It appears that that country, in defiance of its international obligations, is seeking to find and define new roles and missions for its nuclear forces in order to justify their continued retention in the post-cold-war era. In so doing, they have even resorted to irresponsible methods, such as manipulating intelligence and fear in order to promote programmes that their people would not otherwise support. They will soon realize that their nuclear weapons have virtually lost any conceivable rationale, because the conditions in today's world have become so different from those that prevailed during the cold war.

Such developments, if they persist, will undermine the norms and principles of nuclear disarmament set out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in the NPT and in the agreements reached at its 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences. Those norms and principles were established as a result of a long and painstaking multilateral process. We hope that the outcome of our deliberations within the Disarmament Commission will contribute to upholding those norms and principles.

Nuclear-weapon States need to take effective confidence-building measures by fully implementing their commitments to nuclear disarmament. In the coming days, the sincerity and the seriousness of nuclear-weapon States regarding their commitment to the objective of nuclear disarmament will be tested within the Commission.

Non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as recognized in the NPT, are of great importance. Those issues should be considered on their own merits, with due attention to the rights and obligations of Member States under the relevant provisions of the NPT. Unfortunately, non-proliferation has been manipulated by a few countries as a pretext for advancing their narrow national interests and for depriving developing countries of their right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. The Commission needs to reflect on non-proliferation in all its aspects and to recommend certain measures to ensure the critical balance between non-proliferation obligations and the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

My delegation acknowledges the merit of a concise draft for successfully concluding our work on the first agenda item. The paper provided by the Chairman of Working Group I contains elements of a consensus document. However, there is still room for refinement and improvement in order to strike a proper balance.

With regard to the second agenda item, namely, practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, I would like to briefly elaborate a few main principles on the basis of which, in our view, such measures could work.

First, confidence-building measures must be workable and must contribute to strengthening peace, security and stability when they are implemented reciprocally by two parties to an agreement. Thus, they must not be "one-way roads".

Secondly, confidence-building measures must be merely voluntary measures and therefore must not in any way become legally binding obligations.

Thirdly, confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons at the international level have been manifested in the form of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Register itself was established on the basis of General Assembly resolution 46/36 L, which provided for further development of the Register and transparency measures related to weapons of mass destruction.

Fourthly, it is a recognized fact that the transparency of thousands of conventional weapons is not comparable with the transparency of the existence or non-existence of a single nuclear warhead.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming our firm belief that we should make every effort and demonstrate a spirit of cooperation and goodwill with a view to making progress in the important task before us. The successful conclusion of this meeting will enhance the standing of this body within the disarmament machinery.

Mr. Ehouzou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Mr. Chairman, I wish to express to you, on behalf of my delegation, my warm congratulations on your election at this third annual session of the Disarmament Commission during the three-year cycle that began in 2006. I assure you of my delegation's cooperation. Together with the other members of the Bureau, we will do our best to contribute to the success of the Commission's work, which the international community so eagerly awaits.

Benin associates itself with the statements made by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement at the 284th meeting and by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Group of African States.

I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his important statement to the Commission this morning and for his appeal to Member States to step up their efforts in order to conclude this third and last session successfully.

Since 2006, we have given in-depth thought to ways in which the international community can overcome the challenges facing it in the two principal areas regarding which the General Assembly has requested the Commission to make substantive recommendations. That exercise has revealed our differences, as well as the alternative which humanity faces in the area of international peace and security, particularly with regard to nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

We can choose between two fundamental options. On the one hand, we can seek security, and maximize insecurity for everyone, by engaging in an arms race, with confrontation, exacerbation of international tension and, of course, the risk of conflict as consequences. That is an option which the United Nations Charter tells us we must resolutely reject.

The second option consists of strengthening the collective security system established by the United Nations Charter, which calls on States to promote security through cooperation, given the global threats

which face the international community. This approach involves an unequivocal commitment to general and complete disarmament, including the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantee against their proliferation and use.

Despite the very difficult situation currently prevailing in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, we must look on this session of the Disarmament Commission as a new opportunity and use it to steer humanity in that direction, clearly identifying the measures to be taken to make this option of security through cooperation a credible one.

The Disarmament Commission has a crucial role to play. As the sole deliberative body of the disarmament machinery, its function is to serve as a crucible for the forging of a new consensus on the course to be taken and the means to be employed to meet the challenges which the contemporary world faces. States must use this forum to reinvigorate multilateralism and boost mutual confidence, and they must find appropriate responses to their legitimate security needs without endangering the chances of survival of present and future generations.

In order to do this, the Disarmament Commission must make well-balanced recommendations aimed at achieving, in particular, the goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, while recognizing the intrinsic link between disarmament and non-proliferation and the need to move forward in the search for a way out of the impasse in which the international community is currently trapped.

In this connection, my delegation reaffirms the vital role of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. It also supports the treaties concluded for the establishment of Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zones and Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction with particular reference to non-State actors.

These international instruments need to be supplemented by an international treaty on negative security assurances, a treaty on the production of fissile materials and an international convention on measures to prevent the access of non-State actors to weapons of mass destruction.

Thus, if we remain faithful to the common goal of the progressive and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons, we are bound to refute once and for all any attempt to justify as acceptable the use of nuclear weapons, the efforts of recent years for the improvement and modernization of nuclear arsenals and the continuation of programmes that encourage the proliferation of such weapons.

We appeal to the nuclear Powers to take agreed measures to promote disarmament and avoid the accidental use of nuclear weapons. We are extremely concerned about strategic plans that provide for the advance deployment of new strategic weapons, which are bound to fan tensions and revive the reflexes of the Cold War.

We urge the States thought to be engaged in clandestine proliferation to abide by international law in order to preserve the inalienable right of all States to conduct research and development and to utilize nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

As for our continent, Benin reiterates its support for the declaration and plan of action which were adopted during the African ministerial conference on nuclear power, held in Algiers on 9 and 10 January 2007. They were endorsed by the Executive Council of the African Union during its tenth ordinary session held in Addis Ababa on 25 and 26 January 2007.

As the African countries have done, all States should adopt confidence-building measures, which have taken on added importance in the light of the climate of suspicion that exists in the international arena with regard to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and with regard to the accumulation of conventional weapons. We must promote an integrated vision of confidence-building measures, taking into consideration the different perceptions of threats and challenges to the security of States in the strengthening of international peace on the basis of a balance in security.

The ongoing improvement of the efficiency of mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention at various levels and the strengthening of world governance will no doubt contribute considerably to reducing the demand for armaments and creating conditions that are conducive to significant progress in the area of disarmament. To achieve this end, we must evolve towards a more equitable international system that can offer a framework for the prospering of all peoples.

Making the international system more equitable also requires more sustained efforts to ensure appropriate financing for development, in order to eliminate poverty, overcome pandemic diseases and attenuate climate change. The reality of this phenomenon is now well established, and its well-known consequences may lead to international tensions that increase the frequency of armed conflicts. It is also important to bring to a successful conclusion the efforts made to put an end to long-standing conflicts that have a negative impact on international relations. An example is the Middle East, where the creation of a zone of peace and cooperation free from nuclear weapons is an urgent priority.

Activities that help to erode confidence between peoples and that fuel armed conflicts include the exploitation of and illicit trade in high-value and sensitive raw materials. Such activities must be combated with determination, so that the producer countries are able to derive all the economic benefit they expect for their sustainable human development. Furthermore, it is necessary to stop the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons. These weapons cause considerable damage in developing countries, comparable in every respect to what can be produced by weapons of mass destruction and should be treated accordingly.

We need stricter monitoring of arms transfers, and we should spare no effort to achieve the adoption of an international convention on the arms trade which takes into account all aspects of this issue, including munitions. In this spirit, Benin hopes that the next Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects will be crowned with success.

The serious global dangers that threaten humankind call for the mobilization of considerable resources to put an end to this situation. The level of military expenditure attained in the world is inconceivable and unjustifiable for poor countries like mine. The huge sums thus swallowed up are resources that are diverted from the essential concerns of humankind. In the spirit of the Charter, States should devote a minimum amount to arms, which is normal, and more resources to development and the improvement of living conditions in the world. Benin sincerely hopes that humankind will find the path of reason and work harder to secure its own survival than its destruction.

The inertia of the disarmament machinery is not alien to this harmful distortion. It has lasted all too long. The Disarmament Commission has produced no tangible results in the decade that is now ending. It must itself examine its role and the risks it would incur if it became insignificant and lost its raison d'être.

I wish to conclude by stressing the fact that it is of the greatest importance that all States participating in the work of this session show realism and the necessary flexibility to contribute to the long-awaited revitalization of the disarmament machinery in the higher interest of international peace and security.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.